



# Sermon Growth Guide

**November 30, 2025**

**In the Dark Streets**

**Isaiah 8:19-9:7**

**Key Verse:** “The people that walked in the darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined” Isaiah 9:2

**Big Idea:** Leaders and people refuse to trust and seek signs from God, so God takes the initiative to give them a sign: Jesus, the sign and the Son of God, is born to bring light into the darkness.

## Foundations

This text is part of Isaiah’s prophecy (Isaiah 6-9) to Ahaz the young fearful king of Judah. Ahaz is fearful of invasion by Assyria assisted by the kingdoms of Aram/Syria and Ephraim/Israel. What is he to do?

Isaiah meets the trembling young king on the northern road out of Jerusalem, a place where northern armies would come if they invaded Judah (Isaiah 7:3-4). There Isaiah confronts Ahaz and implores him to ask a sign from the LORD to assure him and the people that God would protect them. Ahaz refuses (7:12). In response Isaiah, with a play on words in Hebrew, says, “If you do not amen (God) you will not be amen-ed (by God)” 7:9.

After this encounter the LORD takes the initiative for Ahaz and his people through the signs of two sons and a third promised son of David who will deliver the people. The names of the sons of Isaiah are both plays on words: Immanuel, “God is with us” 7:14, and Maher-shalal-hash-baz, “Quick is the booty, Speedy is the prey” 8:3. Finally, the LORD promises a third son, this time not a son of Isaiah but a son of David (9:7) who is like no son that has ever been born. The prophecies of Isaiah against Ahaz for a sign, which come in the sons Immanuel and Maher-shalal-hash-baz, become the precursors for the special son who will bring all people of out darkness and into light. This son we now know is Jesus, the Son of God.

## Understanding God’s Word

Reading the prophecy of Isaiah to Ahaz takes some familiarity with history of the 8th century BC, when Judah was being threatened not only by the super power of the day, Assyria, but also by the bordering mini-powers Aram and Ephraim. These historical peoples become the context for God to speak into our history, for the Word to become flesh and well among us (John 1:14).

## Applying God’s Word

How has God challenged us to seek for signs? Do we like Ahaz refuse to ask for signs and thus don’t trust God to work in our histories? The biblical Ahaz becomes the epitome of distrust. We don’t want to be like Ahaz, and yet we all are. We lack trust in God even when the Holy Spirit challenges us to trust. The Good News is that in spite of our distrust God acts in trust and faithfulness to us when he sends his son Jesus to walk in our histories.

## Witnessing God’s Word

No one trusts anyone any more. In a culture of fake news, Internet avatars, and the rise of Artificial Intelligence how can we trust? God’s Word in Isaiah and finally in the Word become flesh in Jesus is firm ground, light in the darkness, and genuine intelligence and love. The Good News of a trusty God we can share in a culture of distrust.

Walking in the dark is full of surprises. Few of them are pleasant. Dallas Willard has a famous quote, “Truth reveals reality, and reality can be described as what we humans run into when we are wrong, a collision in which we always lose.” Being wrong is like walking in the dark. My Sundays usually begin before dark. I get ready to go, then move through the bedroom, try to kiss Abigail in the pitch black, then orient myself toward the little green light on the smoke detector over our door! Often I make it out unscathed. But sometimes I don’t. There is a collision with reality—in the form of a dresser. A collision I lose.

“O Little Town of Bethlehem” has that line: “Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light.” In the dark streets. In the darkness. That’s where we start this year as we pitch our attention toward Christmas and the birth of Jesus Christ into our world. He is not a temporary fix. He is not a flash and crash thrill. He is not a momentary relief or helpful distraction from the pain of this world and the disappointments of life. He is the Everlasting Light. The light that does not fade. The light that never goes out. The light that John talked about in John 1, “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” (John 1:5), leaving us to wonder, will the darkness overcome it? No. It never will. It never will. Jesus is the everlasting light. All other lights fade. All other fires go out. All other lamps run out of battery or bulb. I want us focused on the eternity of Christ’s light. This is the everlasting light. And we need that light, because our world is full of dark streets. We are tired of walking in darkness. We need the light of Christ In the Dark Streets.

You might have heard these verses from Isaiah before. They are famous around Christmastime. Which is funny because they were penned 700 years before Christmas happened. What are we looking at here? Near as we can tell, this was written around 700 BC or so when the Kingdom of David and Solomon had been split in two, north

and south, Israel and Judah. Judah conspired with foreign powers against Israel. Brother against brother. Isaiah had the ability to see far into the future. He was far-sighted, given far-sightedness by the Spirit of God, to see how the decisions and actions and attitudes of the heart of his people in his time would play out. Isaiah could see a 700-year road ahead based on what his people were choosing in his own times. That’s a prophet. Can you imagine our people 700 years from now? If we keep making decisions like we are making now, where will we be in the year 2725? And it’s not just a question of “them, out there.” It’s a question of “me, in here.” If I continue in this way, where will it lead? We must each ask. What are we doing with the darkness, in the dark streets of our lives?

“When someone tells you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living?” (Isaiah 8:19) Do you know what the moral dilemma of the day is today? Whether or not to create an AI companion based on the loved one of yours who just passed away. It’s happening; people are doing it. Funeral homes will be offering this next. I can understand how that might promise to ease the pain, but I don’t think it will. Not in the long run. Where do you turn with your pain and your loss? Not only losing a loved one to death. There is so much loss in life. Losing a job, and the prospects of a future you were picturing. Losing health and along with it the plans. Perceiving a loss of a future for your children based on their choices or patterns or mistakes. Loss. What do you do with it? In the dark streets we are tempted to find any passing light that gets promised. Check this screen. Put on this AI chatbot. Consult the dead. Isaiah says, “Consult God’s instruction and the testimony of warning. If anyone does not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn.” (Isaiah 8:20) Better still to turn to the Word of God than the horoscope or the AI chatbot.

Why? Isaiah paints a picture of the lost soul. In fact, he paints some of the most realistic and insightful pictures of the human condition apart from God as I find in Holy Scripture. In Isaiah 1 it is a picture of a person who is an open wound from head to foot. In Isaiah 59 it is a picture of stumbling blind in the noonday sun, darkened as if at night, growling like bears in hunger, moaning like doves of forlorn love, banging against reality over and over again, a collision we always lose. Here, Isaiah 8, it is the response of the desperate soul trying to navigate the darkness, and looking to false offers of light. Mediums, spiritists, pseudo-helpers, false prophets, false promises, and eventually the frustration of unfulfilled hope leads to anger. “Distressed and hungry, they will roam through the land; when they are famished, they will become enraged and, looking upward, will curse their king and their God.” (Isaiah 8:21) None of this is working. The pills aren’t doing it. The numbing nights binging Netflix are not bringing peace. The alcohol only makes it worse the morning. The vices I pursue at night to comfort my lonely heart only make me feel lonelier in the morning, and steeped in shame. I have tools to numb the pain temporarily, but what I need is everlasting light. 700 years ago, today, it’s all the same. This is the lost soul. The human condition apart from God. Distressed. Hungry. Roaming. Famished...and getting mad at God. They only look up to curse God, then back down: “Then they will look toward the earth and see only distress and darkness and fearful gloom, and they will be thrust into utter darkness.” (Isaiah 8:22) They look back down to see nothing that adds light, and darkness doubles darkness doubles darkness. In the dark streets. I only dwell on it because you already know it, and sometimes we need to name it. What a vision of spiritual, psychological and emotional darkness.

Isaiah sees it. But Isaiah can also see something else coming behind it. “Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past

he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the nations, by the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan.” (Isaiah 9:1) Galilee? That’s no fancy place. That’s not where the good stuff comes from. Isaiah sees Galilee honored 700 years before the ministry of Jesus. There is stuff in Isaiah that is just wild. How can he know? Some church fathers called Isaiah the Fifth Gospel because it tells the story of Jesus’ ministry so clearly. That’s a reminder that we are part of a much bigger story than any of us recognize. God knows about Galilee. God knows how things will play out, long after you and I are done.

In the dark streets there will be “no more gloom for those who were in distress.” No more gloom. Gloom—faint light, dimness, shadowy obscurity, like the faint light of dusk when all cats are grey. The dim light when the mountains are just one black shadow. The dim light where there is no color, no life, no range of feeling, no fullness. Gloom, in the dark streets. Gloom is where you can’t tell if the shadowy figure in front of you is a friend or attacker. You can’t tell milk from motor oil. You can’t see if your way is clear or if your shin is about to meet with a coffee table. I have a habit when I’m sick. A doctor once told me to mix up a saline mixture, salt and water, and use a Q-Tip to swab my nose. It works great. I have a habit of mixing that up and leaving it on the counter in a small glass. I also have a habit of finishing other peoples’ drinks that have been left behind. Both very endearing habits in my opinion. They haven’t always served me the best. In the dark streets, in the gloom, you can’t tell what you are looking at. Gloom. No more.

“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.” (Isaiah 9:2) A light has dawned. I went on the Southwest Trip when I was in fifth grade, I think. It was a long, multi-day field trip down to Mesa Verde and Four Corners and Santa Fe. I was ready to be home. I

was aching with homesickness, but it was taking us longer than we expected to get back. It was dark, late, I was tired, and sad, sitting in the middle seat looking out the windshield as we were driving through pitch black night up Highway 115. I mean, deep black. Then we crested a hill and there was a glow on the horizon. The city glow. On those living in a land of deep darkness, a light has dawned, a great light. Not just a light, a great light. What is it? "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this." (Isaiah 9:6-7) How does Isaiah see this? The end of darkness, the dawning of light, it comes as a child born, a son given.

Are you tired of darkness? I am weary of it. Any headline will do. My heart is in Nigeria lately. I've never been there, but reading about these kidnappings of hundreds of kids stops my heart. How much darkness can we stand? Not physical darkness. Spiritual darkness. Confusion. Lies. Deceptions believed. What Isaiah wanted his people to know is that he could see the pain, God could see the pain, and God was sending help. Help was on the way. Isaiah did not accept the pretense that some people were okay without God. They were living lost in dark streets. Hungry as bears. Aching inside. Banging into reality in the dark, bruised and broken. Church, these are our neighbors. These are our friends.

Today is the beginning of the new year on the church calendar. The church calendar was created in the Middle Ages by Gregorian monks, and created the calendar year we know. January 1st will mark the year of our Lord 2026, but the new liturgical calendar starts today. A new beginning.

Let's mark a new beginning of our mission to reach these lost neighbors, family members and friends, with the light of Jesus. Fresh start. How long will we leave them out in the dark streets? December 24th is the biggest evangelistic opportunity of our year. Did you know that? God has so ordained that our church is a host for many people on Christmas Eve, many who don't know Jesus. We have room, particularly later. Everything we do from here to Christmas Eve is part of putting our best effort out there to reach the lost with the light of Christ. I regularly have people reach out to me to tell me they met Christ at First Pres on Christmas Eve. This is not a mission for us to have the best time ever, the sweetest Christmas cookie moment ever, the warmest sentiments ever. Church, this is a mission to make the best effort we can to reach as many as we can with the light of Christ, in the dark streets. Where are they? Will you meet them, invite them, and allow the possibility that God may call them out of darkness and into his marvelous light?

Jesus stepped down out of heaven, out of the Kingdom of Light, into the dark streets of Bethlehem. How dark it must have felt to the Light of the World when his eyes opened to Mary and Joseph in the cave in Bethlehem. Jesus entered our darkness so we could know his light, so we could walk in the light, as he is in the light. No more gloom. He took on the darkness on the cross. When he died, all was dark, and dark and cold he lay in the tomb. And then he rose again to the eternal light of the Kingdom he established. Do you know this light? Do you know this Lord?